Why do downside thinkers often become the hidden cost inside sales teams?

One of the biggest hiring mistakes sales leaders make is assuming skills and attitude are the same thing.

They are not.

Skills can be trained.
Attitudes are far more deeply wired.

I work closely with the Self-Management Group, and in a recent article, John Maxwell discussed downside thinking. These ways of looking at things are often formed by a person's late teens or early twenties.

Over time, these become habits, ways of interpreting the world and responding to pressure, setbacks, feedback, rejection, and authority.

That matters enormously in sales.

Sales is not only about skill. Emotional resilience matters, too.

You can teach someone how to prospect.
You can teach objection handling.
You can teach presentation structure.

As John writes, it is far harder to teach optimism, ownership, emotional responsibility, and the ability to stay constructive under pressure.

He then introduces downside thinking.

A downside thinker naturally focuses on problems first. What is wrong? Who failed them? What frustrated them. What they dislike. Why something won't work.

And the scary part?

Many downside thinkers interview extremely well.

They can sound intelligent, analytical, experienced, even self-aware.

Behind polished answers often lies a pattern of blame, negativity, frustration, and low motivation.

One of the simplest ways to identify this during recruitment is through open-ended questions such as:

“What do you think about your current or previous manager?”

The answer itself matters less than the order and emotional tone of the response.

Downside thinkers usually lead with negatives.

“Well… to be honest, communication wasn’t great.”
“They didn’t *really support the team.”*
“There were a lot of problems there.”
“I got frustrated because…”

Only later do they mention positives.

Upside-down thinkers tend to do the opposite.

They naturally begin with balance, perspective, and positives.

“She was actually very supportive.”
“I learned a lot there.”
“There were definitely challenges, but…”
“He pushed me hard, which helped me grow.”

This reflects what many psychologists refer to as a healthier positive-to-negative ratio. In practical terms, upside-down thinkers generally approach situations with more emotional

stability and constructive thinking.

Why does this matter so much in sales?

Salespeople live in an environment full of ambiguity, rejection, pressure, and setbacks.

A downside thinker often interprets:
No response as rejection.
Feedback as criticism.
Targets as pressure.
Change as unfairness.
Prospecting as emotional risk.

Over time, they affect team culture, lead to resistance to coaching, and create friction within teams.

Upside thinkers are not unrealistic or blindly positive. They simply recover faster. They maintain perspective. They look for solutions before blame.

This can influence everything.

Especially in leadership.

Even one downside thinker can affect morale, coachability, and performance across a team.

The uncomfortable truth is this:

Many businesses spend enormous amounts of money trying to train people out of attitudes they should never have hired in the first place.

That is why assessment tools, behavioural interviewing, and deeper emotional pattern recognition matter more than ever.

The lesson is simple.

Stop hiring chronic downside thinkers.

Because while skills can improve surprisingly quickly…

Attitudes usually don’t.

Great advice from John. If you want help with sales team challenges, reach out to our team.

Have a great week.

Mike